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ABSTRACT

The factors for an effective administrative task force are examined in this report on the Syracuse school superintendent's Issue Analysis Team. The team, composed of voluntary potential administrators, acts as a special task force to facilitate informed decision making by the school superintendent. Topics discussed are member selection, role functions, career impact, and benefits to participants. Findings based on observation and participation suggest that team success depends on being able to integrate individual strengths and address personal weaknesses. Implementation of the team provides the district with an inexpensive research resource and gives potential administrators the opportunity to develop useful skills for future positions. (LMI)

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Using the "Issue Analysis Team" Concept to Develop Administrative Potential

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Using the "Issue Analysis Team" Concept to Develop Administrative Potential

A team of potential administrators can serve as a valuable in-district resource for collecting, analyzing and presenting the data necessary for sound decision-making.

Rationale

In today's rapidly changing educational environment, the superintendent of schools needs extensive data in order to make informed decisions. Frequently, the data required to resolve an increasing number of issues is not readily available or it necessitates independent analysis. Quite often, new data on a potential problem must be gathered within a very short timeframe. In Syracuse, New York, the Superintendent's Issue Analysis Team was created to meet these needs as well as to investigate and apply innovative ideas to educational settings.

History and Operation

The first Superintendent's Issue Analysis Team in was established during the 1981-82 school year and consisted of five members. During subsequent years, the number was increased to six. Each team has completed numerous projects ranging from computer applications for administrative reports to in-depth research on multicultural education and alternatives to standardized assessment.

Currently, the Superintendent appoints the team which is responsible for its own organization. Selection criteria for team members include:

1) Willingness to serve in a voluntary capacity;

2) Interest in becoming an educational administrator;

3) Plans for obtaining administrative certification;

4) Ability to do highly professional research;

5) Ability to respect the legitimate needs of the superintendent of schools for confidentiality; and

6) Demonstrated potential for educational administration

A team facilitator (a building level administrator who has served on a previous team) works directly with the team to help coordinate research efforts and serve as an intermediary to the district staff. Additionally, a superintendent's liaison assists the team with securing appropriate meeting locations and, in some cases, materials for use by the team. Both the superintendent's liaison and the team facilitator serve to promote communication with internal and external offices and organizations thereby providing additional resources for the team. These individuals also assist in defining research parameters and in establishing the format of final reports.

Meetings are usually held one or more nights a week according to a consensus of the team members who do not receive a stipend for their participation. Depending upon the projects, the time commitment of members ranges from five to twenty hours per week. The team may approach any given topic as a total group or as subcommittees. The expectation is that the team will complete assigned research within the timeframe established by the superintendent.

The research process utilized by the team includes data base searches and telephone contacts with numerous school districts and state education departments. Letters are frequently written requesting information and materials from leading consultants and experts in the field. In addition, the team establishes personal contacts with educators and professionals at local colleges and universities.

Role Functions of Team Members

It was necessary for roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined in order to facilitate productive teamwork. The effectiveness of the team increased once members developed an awareness of each others' recurrent behavioral patterns. Individual team members displayed a variety of task and maintenance-oriented behavioral roles during the

course of the year. These behaviors served to ensure task completion as well as facilitate effective interaction among team members:

Initiator	Proposes tasks, defines problems and offers solutions.
Task Master/Orienter	Reminds others of upcoming deadlines, strives to keep the group goal-oriented, and provides direction regarding the group's research efforts.
Information Seeker/Giver	Requests or offers facts, asks for opinions and seeks ideas.
Gatekeeper	Facilitates the participation of others and elicits equal participation from all team members.
Encourager	Affirms the acceptance of others' contributions.
Standard Setter	Ascertains whether the group is satisfied with its standards for accomplishment.

Benefits of Team Membership

The Superintendent's Issue Analysis Team provides the chief school executive with opportunities to observe and assess the skills and potential of prospective administrative candidates prior to placement in permanent positions. Skills which can be observed during the course of the year include research, writing, oral presentation, critical analysis and application of research findings. Additionally, the interpersonal skills possessed by each group member can be evaluated as interactions occur within the group and with other staff members. Some benefits of team membership include:

1) Reinforcement of human relation skills (sensitivity, rapport-building, group process) and personal coping skills through group interaction;

2) Development of managerial skills such as planning and organizing;

3) Increased awareness of the personal sacrifices (in terms of time and family) which an administrative career entails;

4) Development of a meaningful support network among team members which continues after the team disbands;

5) Exposure to a wide variety of experiences in the various divisions and departments of the district; and

6) Increased personal/professional growth. Some team members were able to articulate their own "sense of mission" by the end of the year and identify unique motivating factors for entering the educational administration field. Examples of such factors include the personal commitment to make an affirmative impact on the lives of as many students as possible and the ability to receive satisfaction from nurturing the professional development of staff members.

Impact on Career of Team Members

Since 1981-88[1] , forty-one (41) persons have participated in the Superintendent's Issue Analysis Team with twenty-nine (29) attaining administrative positions within the District. Eight other former team members accepted positions in other school districts within New York State, including one Director of Pupil Services, two Directors of Special Education and five principalships. Of the remaining four former team members, two have returned to classroom teaching assignments within the District; one found career-related employment in the private sector, and one secured an administrative position with a social services agency.

Conclusion

The success of the team apparently depended upon how well the collective membership was able to integrate individual strengths and address individual weaknesses. Each team member brought a specific strength such as research skills, public speaking ability, etc. to the group. Additionally, each individual focused on a personal weakness or shortcoming he or she hoped to remediate through the group process. Decision making,

[1] During the 1988-89 school year, the Superintendency was in transition; therefore, no team was convened.

team work, communication, leadership and interpersonal relations were found to be essential skills for problem solving.

Application of the issue analysis team concept to educational settings merits further study. The ensuing team-district interaction fosters an empowering, mutually beneficial relationship. For a minimal cost, the team provides the district with an in-house unit to conduct in-depth research and make recommendations regarding specific district concerns. In exchange, members of the team are able to display individual levels of skill attainment and potential which become increasingly apparent as members interview for subsequent administrative positions.